



Morgan County Commission

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TO: PARK PLANNING AND ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

FROM: LARRY LOWER

SUBJECT: DRAFT BOARD REPORT

DATE: MARCH 4, 2004

At the last meeting of the Board, I agreed to prepare a draft report for review of the Board prior to the next scheduled meeting. Please review and provide any comments at the meeting. The report certainly needs some strong editing and I welcome anyone's help in achieving a well-prepared report. However, our primary goal at the meeting is to achieve consensus if possible on conclusions and recommendations so that we can provide a report to the County Commission in April.

The next scheduled meeting for the County Park Advisory and Planning Board has been scheduled for Thursday, March 11th at 7:00 p.m. in the County Commission Room.

I appreciate your willingness to serve on this committee, and if this time is not convenient for your schedule, please contact Bette at 258-8540.

COUNTY PARK ADVISORY & PLANNING BOARD

		<u>Term</u>
Larry Lower	Fair Association	4/30/04
Pam Hessler		4/30/04
Bob Banks	Parks & Recreation	4/30/04
Kenny Mason		
Daniel Unger	B. S. Fire Company	4/30/04
Gail Shade	Boys & Girls Club	4/30/04
Leila Stuckey	Senior Life Service	4/30/04
James Michael	Soil Conservation Service	4/30/04
Charles Biggs	Citizen	4/30/04
Jackie Fisher-Murray		
Laura Smith	School Board	4/30/04
Rev. Andrew Cooney	Clergy Association	4/30/04
Glen Stotler	Commissioner	4/30/04

Draft (1 Mar 04)
REPORT TO MORGAN COUNTY COMMISSION
From
COUNTY PARK ADVISORY AND PLANNING BOARD
On
DEVELOPMENT OF 16 ACRE PARCEL ON US 522

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations:

- A. Development of the 16 acre site, without additional lands, will not serve as an ideal site for large events, such as fairs, carnivals and concerts. With additional land for parking, the site could be developed for such use, but it would reduce, although not eliminate, the opportunities for other uses.**
- B. Development of the 16 acre site to maximize the number of ballfields would require substantial elimination of many of the site's natural qualities and potential multiple uses and probably still not meet the desired number and type of ballfields desired. A plan could be created to provide some limited additional fields and provide for some additional multiple uses and preserve some natural site qualities.**
- C. The use of the adjacent Ballfield Complex could be improved with possible additional parking, addition of a soccer field, enhancement of girl's softball fields and adjacent features.**
- D. Combining the 16 acre site and improvement of the Ballfield Complex into one design would provide additional opportunities and an improved overall plan than looking at the two sites separately.**
- E. The County should initiate a long term park, recreation and environmental resource preservation plan in the face of rapidly escalating land costs and development activity in the County.**
- F. In the meantime, the County should pursue acquisition of additional lands to serve immediate needs.**
- G. Considering these Park Advisory and Planning Board conclusions and recommendations, the County should proceed with development of a detailed design/engineering plan by an**

experienced recreation planning firm for the improvements at the 16 acre site and Ballfield Complex.

Background:

Mission: The Morgan County Park Advisory and Planning Board was created by the Morgan County Commissions in April 2003 and given the verbal mission statement at the initial meeting in May 2003 to advise the Commissioner on the most appropriate uses of a 16 acre parcel of land along Route 522 adjacent to the existing ballfields. The land was purchased by the County for park and recreation purposes. From the outset the guidance was to consider all potential uses by organizations in the County and to consider the potential for multiple uses and users of the site with the whole County in mind.

Participants: Participants on the Board were identified by the County Commissioners to represent a broad section of organizations with an interest in park and recreation activities. After the first meeting additional individuals were identified to represent the School Board and the Council of Churches. Board members are identified on Attachment 1.

Investigations and Activities Undertaken: Subsequent to the initial meeting on 6 May 2003, investigations included presentations by local organizations who have in the past or are currently pursuing activities with a strong recreation component. Presentations were made by the Boys and Girls Club representative, First Methodist Church representative and a report on the Cultural Arts and Recreation Plan facilitated by the Morgan Arts Council. The Board obtained aerial photographs and topographic mapping of the site through the efforts of Board Member Charles Biggs. The Board requested and received a soils report from Rebecca MacLeod of the Eastern Panhandle Natural Resources Conservation Service . The Board requested and received a vegetation report from Herb Peddicord, County Forester. Two separate field trips were made by Board members.

Site Description and Other Data:

Size: The site is 16 acres located on the northwest corner of and bordered on the east by US Route 522 and on the south by Cold Run Valley Road. It is bordered on the west by private residential land separated somewhat from the 16 acres by a sharp rise in elevation caused by a rock escarpment running north-south along the bottom of the ridge. It is bordered on the north, but separated by a drainage stream from another 16+ acres owned by the County and used for a softball/baseball complex. Aerial photograph and topographic maps are available for perusal at the Morgan County Planning Office.

Soils: Soils on the site are characterized by widely varying soil conditions. Moderately well draining, generally silt loam over clay shale predominates along US522 and the southeast corner of the property (perhaps 25% of the property). Similar conditions prevail in a strip along the western edge of the property at the base of the ridge (perhaps 10% of the property). The remainder (about 60% running in a wide swath diagonally across the property from southwest to northeast on both sides of a generally persistent small stream and wetland) varies from very poorly to seasonally poorly draining soils. Without substantial modification and/or fill, the majority of the site is not well suited to substantial structures, major roadways or substantial parking lots.

Topography: The southeast portion of the property (described above) ranges from 3-15% in slope and is generally well draining. The western edge along the base of the ridge (described above) ranges from 3-15% to very steep at the edge of the property. The large center portion varies from generally flat up to 8% and varies from moderately well draining to very poor draining.

Vegetation: Approximately two-thirds of the property is extensively covered with forest. The primary exception is the southeast portion consisting of old field habitat ranging from open grassland and herbaceous perennials up to 10 to 15 year invasive deciduous and coniferous trees, generally Virginia pine, black locust and green ash. The property bordering the stream, being generally poor draining and likely not actively farmed in recent times ranges from older and larger, but quickly decaying Virginia pine, and younger emerging yellow poplar and other deciduous species. The western portion except along the base of the ridge, was probably actively farmed until 25 years ago and is covered by a substantial growth of yellow poplar and other deciduous species, with limited undergrowth. The western edge has a narrow strip of mature and attractive growth of mature deciduous trees, including ash and oak. One particular specimen, a very large and old oak has survived in the northwest corner of the property. (Please see aerial photograph).

Adjacent Land Uses Influencing the Recommendations:

Ballfield Complex: The land immediately north of the property was probably at one time very similar to the 16 acres described above. It was developed, probably in the 1980's as a major ballfield complex, containing three youth softball fields and an adult softball field centering around a support building, two youth girl's softball fields and adjacent support structures and a large parking lot. The site is substantially used through the spring and summer for men's, Little League and Girls PeeWee

League softball. The property was modified by grading and filling to provide for the playfields and supporting facilities. The property is completely grassed or graveled, except for a narrow strip of wooded land running along the base of the ridge with an old service road on it. This land was purchased within the last few years by the County with the intent of facilitating sewerage handling as part of the complex.

Other adjacent land uses and activities: Land across from the 16 acre parcel on the south of Cold Run Valley Road is residential with one residence. Much of the land is flat, poor draining and generally mowed. Land across 522 to the east is vacant of structures, one small parcel having been excavated, partially leveled and previously built upon. The second is a large agricultural parcel in open grass land.

Traffic access: Traffic access to the site is excellent, being on the main north-south route through Morgan County and an intersecting two-lane paved feeder road (Cold Run Valley Road). Entry to the site could be safely and conveniently accessed from Cold Run Valley Road with acceptable sight lines and grades. Access to or exit from the site on US 522 is possible, but would have to be planned in close conjunction with the Highway Department considering traffic levels and sight lines.

PROCESS:

The planning process included review of the site data, field trips to the 16 acre site, much discussion among the Board on site qualities, recreation and public use demand and opportunities in the County and use of the adjacent properties (particularly the Ballfield Complex). An initial concept site plan was then developed for only the 16 acres. The concept plan and a number of ideas were presented to and discussed with the County Commissioners. These discussions led the Board to pursue some additional site investigations at the Ballfield Complex and development of a second concept plan that looked at the entire 32+ acres. Additionally, it caused us to look at the qualities of adjacent land. The Advisory Board also took the opportunity to informally make recommendations regarding future recreation needs beyond the scope of developing the initial 16 acre site and the expanded 32+ acre site. These are presented below in the Recommendations portion of this report. The second concept plan for the entire 32+ acres was presented informally to the County Commissioners and at the request of the Commissioners to the recently created County Parks and Recreation Board.

It is important to recognize that the development of concept plans was merely to document site considerations and focus the discussions of the

Advisory Planning Board. It is not a recommended plan (see Recommendations). There are other potential arrangements of facilities and siting for the properties than those shown on the drawings.

Considerations:

The following considerations influenced the initial and follow-up concept plans.

Consideration 1: The aesthetics of the site, a mixture of open rolling fields and substantial wooded areas, dramatic topographic variation, a significant drainage feature through the center of the property and substantial areas of poorly draining soil which would prohibit or substantially increase the cost of building construction, led to the strong conclusion that proposed development should take advantage of the features rather than eliminate the majority of the existing site qualities.

Consideration 2: The adjacency of Cacapon State Park has provided Morgan County a substantial recreational and park land resource which has diminished what might have been past pressure for the County to develop such resources. The Park has provided trails, limited outdoor tennis and basketball courts, picnic areas and other features. Although those features have in the past been much available to local residents, increasingly they serve regional visitors. The Board considered whether additional such features should be included in the plan for the 16 acre site, recognizing that the site qualities of the 16 acre site would support such low intensity and passive recreation features, but also recognizing the proximity of the 16 acre site to Cacapon State Park.

Consideration 3: Several organizations are searching for a site/sites for public use development. The Morgan County Fair Board made a request in 2002 for permission to develop the 16 acre parcel as a multi-use public recreation complex which would also serve as a permanent home for the Morgan County Fair and other short duration large events. The Park and Recreation Board is seeking to develop additional youth softball fields and soccer fields, hopefully in the vicinity of the existing Ballfield Complex.

Consideration 4: Due to cost constraints, both in land and development costs, maximum effort should be made to insure that development would not be single purpose or for only short season usage. Rather, development should be for multiple use, serving multiple constituencies and needs for recreation in the County and sites should, to the maximum possible, serve multiple uses, i.e. develop softball fields, such that the outfield might also serve as soccer practice fields.

Consideration 5. Since there is no availability now and unlikely to be in the near future, of public transportation to the Ballfield Complex and the adjacent 16 acres, private automobile transportation has a major influence on any recommendations. The existing Ballfield Complex is already considered by many to provide insufficient parking at peak times. Addition of substantial parking at the 16 acres to serve the existing Ballfield Complex is a consideration. Additionally, developing the 16 acres to serve high intensity, high peak parking for large events such as a County Fair, carnivals or concerts would require development of substantial parking areas that could conflict with preservation of large portions of the site.

Conclusions:

1. Even if additional adjacent land could be made available for parking, development of the 16 acres as a Morgan County Fair Ground (and for other large, short term events needing similar facilities) would essentially take the entire site. Some of the facilities would serve other purposes and other times, i.e. an amphitheater for concerts, large open spaces that could also serve as soccer fields, internal roadways that could also serve as hiking/walking/skating/biking ways and natural areas that serve for picnicking and other small events. Without additional and sufficient parking however, it does not appear that the site is best used for a Fair Ground/large special event location. There was some consideration of developing the area as a short-term site (say 15 years) with the ultimate plan of transferring its use to other compatible purposes beyond that date when County Fairs, carnivals and concerts outgrew the site.
2. There is strong interest in developing several additional playfields (youth softball and soccer) in Morgan County and location of such facilities at and/or in close proximity to the existing Ballfield Complex is desirable. Even with some realignment of functions at the Ballfield Complex to provide a soccer field and more parking, the number and type of desired additional playfields could be developed on the 16 acres site only by leveling the majority of the site, eliminating most of the existing site qualities and devoting the site almost entirely to playfields and supporting parking areas. Procurement of adjacent additional land could perhaps ease the pressure on the 16 acres somewhat, but the site would still not provide all of the ballfields desired.

3. Developing a plan by considering opportunities at the existing Ballfield Complex in conjunction with opportunities at the 16 acre site, increases the range of choices. Some consideration was given to moving the large adult softball field to another location, converting the existing adult field to a youth field with the outfield serving as a soccer field. Realigning and improving the parking areas could increase the amount of parking. Realigning the two girl's softball fields and the immediate adjacent areas could possibly improve the quality of the fields as well as solve some parking and erosion control needs. Development of a circular internal service road around and through the Ballfield Complex and the 16 acre site could provide for hooking the two areas together from a pedestrian as well as service standpoint. Procurement of additional lands nearby could increase options for both sites even more.
4. Discussions within the Board over the last several months of the Board's deliberations, repeatedly returned to the strong belief that the 16 acre site, even in conjunction with the Ball field Complex and any additional adjacent land that might be procured, is unlikely to meet the entire needs for desired additional ballfields or a major special event site such as the County Fair. The resulting conclusion is that the County needs to develop a program of identifying long term park and recreation needs, resources needed to satisfy those needs and a plan to create opportunities to achieve those goals. Land costs are escalating rapidly in the County and private acquisition of land for development purposes, is increasingly putting into jeopardy the opportunities to set aside environmentally sensitive and recreationally attractive land for future generations in Morgan County.
5. Despite the foresight of the County to procure the 16 acre site for future recreation use, and despite the fact that the land can be put to beneficial park and recreation use, we learn that the most effective way to set aside park and recreation is based upon a plan of future needs and a steady program of setting aside the resources to make that plan successful. Such a program should certainly take advantage of lands that might be purchased at opportune moments or be donated in some fashion by benevolent individuals, but not depend on those sources alone.

Recommendations:

Specific to the 16 acre site:

- A. The best uses of the 16 acre parcel (assuming no additional adjacent land is made available) is:
 - i. preservation and protection of site qualities
 - ii. careful development of additional parking to serve the uses of the 16 acre site along with the existing or realigned activities at the Ballfield Complex
 - iii. installation of wastewater and water supply features
 - iv. development of two or three playfields (specific type and manner of multiple use to be determined)
 - v. preservation of significant portions of the natural areas for low intensity use such as picnicking, walking and nature activities
 - vi. preservation and aesthetic use of the central wetlands and poor draining areas for a small lake with environmental and storm water control qualities and
 - vii. a one way internal automobile circulation system that could also be used for walking, skating biking and strolling. Primary entry/egress would be from Cold Run Valley Road.
- B. The extension of sewer service to the site would increase the area available for development of parking and playfields while helping protect the environmental qualities of the site by reducing the pressure to develop sensitive areas.

Other recommendations:

Enhancements to the ballfield complex:

- A. Explore the opportunity to relocate the men's softball field replacing it with an additional youth field and soccer field. In the event that the adult field is not relocated, explore the possibility of slight redesign such that the outfield can also be used for a soccer field.
- B. Redesign and upgrade parking areas to maximize the amount of parking available at the Ballfield Complex.
- C. Explore realignment and redesign of the two girls softball fields to solve existing drainage and erosion problems, perhaps provide more parking and improve the ancillary support activities, such as shelters, refreshment stands, rest rooms and seating areas.

- D. In conjunction with the 16 acre site, explore the opportunity for an internal service road/walkway tying the two sites into one complex and bridging between the two sites. Some potential exists for resolving the existing drainage problems around the periphery of the Ballfield Complex in conjunction with the drainage from the 16 acre site.

Other County park and recreation actions:

- A. Initiate immediately a study of the short and long term needs for park and recreation resources in Morgan County with the intent of developing a park and recreation plan for Morgan County for the next 30 years. This should be accomplished by contract with a firm or organization well experienced in recreation and resource planning. It should explore opportunities and options for setting aside appropriate resources and financing park, recreation and environmental resource protection and development.
- B. In the immediate short term, the County should begin a communication process within the County that would identify potential for acquiring land already needed, to include large event facilities, such as fairs, carnivals and special events, as well as other facilities on which there can be immediate agreement as to need.